No. 18

The
REDEMPTION
of
Marie Gordon
THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD
Price 10¢

"I am taking a vacation," she had warned him one night at a cabaret. "I'll not talk about the play until you have finished it. Then bring it to me and read it."

R. of M. G., No. 18.

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Cincinnati, Ohio.

RUTH GORDON'S eyes were upon her brother as he uttered those words. She was quite sure of the slight tremor in his voice. And she began to wonder just what Phil's mental attitude was toward Miss Desmond. It was by no means an easy matter for her to keep the secret locked in her young, impulsive and warm heart. Oh, how she would have loved to tell Phil the truth.

She longed to open his eyes to the fact that the beautiful woman who played the governess to his children was none other than Marie, his first wife.

But Ruth loved Marie far too well to violate a trust reposed in her. She listened quietly as Phil repeated in a dreamy voice:

"Yes, God was indeed good to us when He sent Miss Desmond to us."

"God showed you more mercy than you deserved," answered Ruth devoutly and enigmatically. "Some day you will realize what—"

The sudden ring of the telephone bell prevented Gordon from hearing the last sentence finished. Ruth rose and took the receiver from the hook.

"Hello," she cried, and waited for the reply. It came in a deep masculine voice.

"Hello, Alice," it said. "How is my little sweetheart to-day? I have made all the arrangements as per your instructions for the Madison Country Clulb dance. Now get set for the time of your life. And say, don't forget what you promised me. You won't, will you?"

Philip Gordon sat watching his sister narrowly. He saw her face turn a shade paler in the all too evident confusion.

"Who is it?" he asked in a clear voice.

In the meantime the party at the other end had hung up the receiver because he discovered that he was

not talking to the right woman. Ruth moved away from the telephone, but she could not avoid her brother.

"Who was that on the wire?" he demanded, seizing her by the arm.

"I don't know." The answer was truthful.

"Was it a man?"

"Yes," Ruth admitted.

"Did he want me?"

"No, Phil."

"Who then?"

"Your wife."

Gordon nodded his head and a bitter smile crossed his face.

But no matter how he coaxed, he could not induce Ruth to repeat what the man had said over the phone.

It was really not necessary for his suspicions had been aroused sometime ago.

With his teeth set he pulled himself together. But his mind was made up to one thing—Alice should not drag his name into the gutter.

With his arms folded across his breast he began pacing the floor.

His home must be brought out of its present chaos by all means if he wanted to remain sane. And he grimly determined to deal straight from the shoulder with every phase of it.

First of all Ruth's case must be satisfactorily disposed of. It was nothing short of a crime to allow her to submit to any more of his wife's resentment and insults.

"Yes, I believe it would be best if I sent you away for a while, Ruth," he said half aloud. "I know how miserable you must be here. It is utterly useless to bring you and Alice a little closer together. She hates you without reason. She hates her own father, and I think

she hates herself at times.

"But," he continued, his eyes flashing angrily, "I will not have you abused by her. I have been standing this thing long enough. From now on I shall not neglect you as I have been doing."

"You never willfully neglected me, Phil," the girl objected as she ran over to him and put a hand on his shoulder. "Whatever you did or neglected to do was because—because——"

"Because I was not man enough to assert myself as the master of this house," Gordon broke in. "I plead guilty to that, sis. But from this day on things will be changed, and Alice better watch her step. Why," he added with a hoarse laugh, "even her own father advised me to divorce her. Think of it, Ruth."

"Oh, it is terrible," Ruth agreed.

"I have an idea," Phil spoke again after a long moment of silent thoughtfulness. "How would you like to go to Bar Harbor for the summer? Olive Bentley has a cottage there. You remember her, don't you? She used to be quite fond of you."

"Indeed, I do," replied the girl. "I remember Olive Bentley very well, although she is a few years older than I am. And I remember when she returned from France where she served as a nurse during the war."

Gordon's lips curved into a reminiscent smile.

"Olive and I were always good pals," he declared. "And being the sole heir to her father's wealth has not turned her head. I think she would be glad to have you spend a few months with her. By jove, what a capital idea. I wish it had occurred to me sooner."

Phil Gordon was waxing enthusiastic. "She'll make an ideal chaperone for you, Ruth," he cried. "I want to see you happy again as you were before——"

"It takes so little to make me happy," Ruth sighed

and kissed her big brother.

"Do you want to go to Olive Bentley?" Phil asked the question direct.

"I'd love to," came back in a murmur.

"Alright, sis. I'll write to Olive at once and tell her that you will start for Bar Harbor to-morrow. Will that suit you?"

"Yes—yes," cried Ruth eagerly, "I'll start packing my trunk right away. I've got plenty of clothes, Phil. I won't need a thing."

"Go ahead."

That settled the matter and Ruth's case was disposed of for the summer at least.

But it is doubtful if Philip Gordon would have been so anxious to send his only sister to far-off Bar Harbor if he had known whom she was destined to meet there.

Bar Harbor, Maine, was the gathering place each summer for blase society people from all over the country, the mecca of overworked stage folk, tired professional men, business men and social lepers.

Artists, writers and a goodly portion of America's sporting element sought relief from the heat there. They all came to rest and to play, to see and to be seen, to love and to be loved.

Some came with a fixed purpose, others with no thought of what fate held in store for them. In the latter category lovely Ruth Gordon must be placed.

For fate had willed that she should be one of the chief actresses in a drama running the gamut of all human emotions from blind love to fierce jealousy and vindictive hatred.

But that was not all!

Fate had also decreed that Ruth Gordon should be brought face to face with the one folly of her young

girlhood days — the love affair, the consequences of which, had for a time, dethroned her reason.

She was destined to become the ally of a man, who under the guise of friendship committed murder.

As she began packing her trunk with almost feverish haste, there was a song on her lips and keen anticipation in her young heart.

Occasionally, however, she expericnced a feeling akin to dread. It was as if something or somebody wanted to warn her of the future.

Chapter 57

GORDON'S ULTIMATUM

RUTH GORDON'S departure from Oak Manor caused only a ripple of excitement. Alice regarded it as a distinct triumph, for she believed that Phil had urged his sister to leave in order to pacify her. She had made countless mistakes so far as her husband was concerned, and this was merely another. Philip Gordon was the means to an end and nothing more to this shallow, selfish creature.

His name meant protection. His wealth provided luxuries, and to be the mistress of his magnificent home was distinctly worth while.

There was a time when Alice thought she could not live without Gordon. And now she wondered how long she would have to endure him and his tyranny.

She imagined herself a married martyr because she had been compelled to bring a child into the world.

She believed herself outraged because Philip no longer granted her every wish.

In spite of her protestation he insisted upon keeping this Miss Desmond as the governess of his children. Every time she encountered Marie she turned up her nose. She never neglected an opportunity to make life miserable for the latter.

One afternoon Marie, accompanied by Harry and Phyllis were romping on the lawn. They were having a glorious time.

As it happened Alice had chosen this same hour to take a walk through the grounds. She was followed by Nora Evans, propelling the smart carriage containing

her baby.

As Alice caught sight of the happy group, an unpleasant expression came into her face and she haughtily turned her head.

It was a deliberate snub, calculated to hurt the pride and sensibility of "that person," as she was wont to call the governess.

Little Phyllis gave a cry of delight at sight of the baby carriage, and ran up as fast as her legs could carry her. Alice did not pay any attention to the child, but continued on her way, frigidly erect and a sneer on her lips.

A moment later, however, she faced about quickly as the baby in the carriage emitted a loud and persistent wail.

"What is the matter?" she demanded sharply.

"Phyllis hurt the baby," Nora Evans replied.

This was a bare-faced lie. Phyllis, with a handful of freshly picked wildflowers, was about to present them to the baby. In doing so she had barely touched the little one's arms.

"Did you hurt the baby?" Alice cried angrily.

"No, I did not," Phyllis answered. "I gave her a lot of flowers, but Nora snatched them away and threw them on the ground. Then the baby began to cry because she wanted the flowers."

Nora Evans flushed wrathfully and glared at her accuser.

"Phyllis lies, Mrs. Gordon," she declared brazenly. "I saw her——"

"Of course she lies," Mrs. Gordon broke in loudly, and with a glance in the direction where the governess stood with Harry. "What else could be expected of her? Both of the children are naturally depraved, and now they are being openly encouraged in their vicious habits.

Now get away from here, you little brat."

Phyllis, her sweet face crimson, did not move away as rapidly as she probably should have done.

The next instant she was the recipient of a stinging blow struck by her step-mother.

The blow fell right across her little mouth. Another was about to follow when something unexpected happened.

Marie dashed across the intervening space and arrested Mrs. Gordon's arm just as it was about to inflict further punishment upon Phyllis.

"Don't strike the child, madam. I won't tolerate it!" Marie exclaimed in hot indignation. "She does not deserve it. Phyllis never lies."

The second Mrs. Gordon measured the governess with a contemptuous stare. This sudden interference was more than she could stand since it came from the woman she hated.

"How dare you address me in such a tone of voice?" she demanded. "I want you to know that I am mistress here, Miss Desmond. Please confine yourself to the duties for which you are paid, and beyond that mind your own affairs. I hope I have made myself perfectly plain."

Marie blushed to the roots of her hair. She glanced down at little Phyllis who was clinging to her hand, and a piteous smile crossed her face.

"Another thing I want you to understand," Alice went on in a rasping voice. "When it comes to disciplining the children, I will not tolerate any interference." Addressing the shrinking Phyllis, she added: "You go to your room at once and stay there.

"And don't you dare leave it for a whole week. That is your punishment for telling a deliberate lie. Now go, and be quick about it. I see I'll have to teach you how

to behave yourself."

Miss Demond held up her hand.

"Mrs. Gordon, this is too severe," she objected, although it cost her a terrible effort to plead with the woman who had robbed her of her dearest treasure. "The punishment is unjust because Phyllis did not tell a deliberate lie."

Alice drew herself up to her full height. For a moment she regarded the governess with withering contempt and scorn.

"So you would argue with me, would you?" she sneered. "You don't seem to know your place, Miss Desmond. What do you know about the children Mr. Gordon had by his first wife? Nothing—absolutely nothing . They lie, they are sneaky, and they can't be trusted. They seem to have inherited all the vices of their mother."

Marie recoiled a step.

Every vestige of color left her face. A passionate reply trembled upon her lips, but before it found utterance, Philip Gordon appeared upon the scene.

"What's the trouble?" he asked in a peremptory tone.

Alice wheeled at the sound of her husband's voice, and she quickly apprised him of what had happened. She told him that Phyllis had deliberately hurt the baby.

"Did you see it with your own eyes?" Philip wanted to know.

"I did not, but Nora did," his wife replied.

"Nora!" There was infinite contempt in his voice.

"Yes, Nora," Alice repeated rebelliously.

Phil turned to one side where Phyllis stood still clinging to Miss Desmond's hand.

The little girl's upper lip was swollen and in spite of the governess' efforts to quiet her, she wept contin-

uously. When her father bent down and wiped the tears from her eyes, she gave him a pathetic smile.

"Did — did my wife strike her?" he inquired of Marie in a whisper.

The latter nodded.

The veins on Gordon's forehead stood out alarmingly, but he managed to restrain himself. He was too much of a gentleman to censure his wife in the presence of servants, much as he resented her brutality.

"I don't think it was necessary to strike Phyllis on the mouth," he said with forced calmness.

"Why, I hardly touched her," lied Alice, then burst into an ugly laugh.

"The child's swollen lip speaks for itself," retorted the father. "And I don't want that sort of thing repeated."

Alice paled at this.

With a vindictive glare at her husband she retreated a step and began talking to Nora. In the meantime Philip addressed himself to the governess.

"You better take the children in the house, Miss Desmond," he said with a kindly smile. "And don't you shed another tear, Phyllis. To-morrow I am going to take you and Harry for a long ride. Just think the fun we will have we'll pick cherries and flowers and——"

"Can Miss Desmond go, too?" Harry broke in.

Marie blushed charmingly. She hid her evident confusion by stooping and brushing off Phyllis' dress.

"Why, certainly," Gordon answered. "Miss Desmond is going with us."

With the boy clinging to one of her arms and Phyllis hanging on to the other, Marie moved away in the direction of the house.

They were not yet out of sight when the master of the house turned to his wife and said:

"Please send Nora to the house also with the baby. I have something to say to you, Alice."

Nora Evans was only too glad to move on. She had a hearty respect for Philip Gordon. It was respect born of fear.

Once she turned and she saw her mistress and Gordon walk toward the pavillion.

Not a single word was spoken as the latter two strolled on. Alice's eyes gleamed with defiance.

She knew that a storm was brewing, and she was prepared for it. It was just as well that they came to a thorough understanding now. But she determined not to yield an inch.

She disdained taking the chair to which Phil pointed. She remained standing, her lips parted expectantly.

"Well?" she spit out when he did not speak at once.

"There must be a change in your attitude and general conduct," Phil began. "You have——"

"If this is going to be a long sermon I might as well sit down," Alice cut in snippishly, and suiting the action to the words she flopped down on a chair none too gently. "All right, now go ahead, my lord and master."

Gordon colored slightly and went on:

"This is most emphatically not the time to indulge in flippancies. And I am not going to preach a sermon because the effort would be waster on you. But I want to tell you that from this day on you must never again in any way interfere with the tutoring and the education of my children."

"Oh, is that so?" his wife scoffed with an ugly laugh.

"Yes, that is so." Philip Gordon spoke calmly enough, but there was an ominous warning in his tone. "I know very well that you dislike my youngsters, but I

can not help that.

"I can, however, give you to understand that I will not tolerate the venting of your dislike for them in unmerited punishment. You struck Phyllis on the mouth. It was a brutal thing to do. I object to that sort of thing, and let's hope it'll never happen again."

Alice shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"Indeed," she sneered, struggling with a passion of temper and excitement." But, of course, your children are so well behaved. And they couldn't do any wrong. You have entrusted them to a very worthy person. Did it ever occur to you that they may have been spoiled."

"They have not been spoiled," Phil returned hotly.

"Oh, no, they couldn't have been," came back swiftly. "That is what you think. Just the same that very thing has happened. This Miss Desmond, who knows what to say and when to say it in order to ingratiate herself with you, she is spoiling them completely."

"I don't agree with you," said Phil.

"Certainly, you don't. I did not expect you to. And since we are talking about this Miss Desmond, how is it that she still holds her position? Was it not understood that she was to leave?"

While Alice uttered these words she leaned forward in her chair in an attitude of anticipation.

"There was no such understanding between you and I," was the disappointing response. "Miss Desmond will never leave my house with my consent. She is going to stay until she leaves of her own volition."

"What?" Alice shrieked. "You mean to keep her here in spite of my repeated objections?"

"I do," Gordon replied determinedly. "Miss Desmond has become indispensable to me. Furthermore, if you had a grain of common sense, you would not object

to her. On the contrary you would study her a little closer and copy her many admirable traits.

"For instance, Miss Desmond literally sacrifices herself for my children. You leave your own to this Nora Evans, a girl I have every reason to distrust.

"You insisted upon having your own way with Nora. I allowed her to stay in deference to your wishes and because I was sick and tired of squabbling with you. I insist upon having my own way so far as Miss Desmond is concerned.

"Since our baby came you have never played the part of a loving mother. You turned the child over to Nora Evans, a woman utterly incapable of taking proper care of it. I am really glad of this opportunity of having an understanding with you, Alice.

"I have been very patient, but that patience has come to a sudden end. It is not becoming to a wife of mine to associate herself with a crowd of watrels such as certain members of the Madison Country Club."

"You stop me — you stop me!" Alice almost screamed. "I won't lete you talk to me like that. I associate with whom I please and when I please."

"You do so at your peril," Phil warned.

"I'll take the consequences, don't you worry," replied Alice.

Gordon rose from his seat and confronted his wife. It could easily be seen that he was holding himself under control by sheer power of will.

"I have only this to say," he declared without anger, "I don't feel inclined to tolerate this Nora Evans any longer under my roof. I want you to replace her at the earliest possible moment. I have learned something about this woman that is not at all to her credit."

Alice's face turned livid at this.

For a moment she was struck speechless. It took

her some time to find her voice, and when she did, she shrilled with all the defiance she could put into the words:

"As long as this Miss Desmond is in the house; as long as you disregard my wishes concerning her, Nora will remain, for she is as indispensable to me as the governess is to you."

"Well, we won't talk any more about that," said Phil. "Miss Desmond is a real mother to my children. In fact she reminds me of their sainted mother——"

"Sainted mother?" A hideous laugh came from Alice's curled lips. "Sainted, indeed. The world knows what kind of a woman she was. You can find plenty more like her on South State street at night. They call them streetwalkers."

With a hissing intake of his breath Gordon sprang forward. He seized his wife by the arm, his fingers digging into the flesh.

"Take that back!" he shouted. "Take that back. You have no right to speak about Marie like that—not you! She was absolutely innocent of any wrong-doing. I found out the truth when it was too late!"

"You found out?" Alice eyes widened. "How and when?"

"I was called to Jack Hoover's bedside before he died," Phil went on. "He passed away in the Cincinnati hospital. He confessed to me the sordid part he played in bringing disgrace and ruin upon the best and noblest woman that ever drew breath. Marie was never guilty of wrongdoing, and we all have sinned grievously against her—I more so than all the rest.

"I forbid you, therefore, to ever cast another aspersion upon her sacred memory. If you do, by God, I won't be responsible for what happens.

"And," he added, releasing her suddenly, "what I have told you goes for every other man and woman alive.

I shall speedily avenge any slur upon my first wife.'

Alice retreated step by step. There was a dangerous glint in her husband's eyes which warned her to be careful.

But an instant later she threw all caution to the winds in her reawakened fury and jealousy of the dead.

"You know as well as I do that it is too late to clear your beloved first wife of the stain which must forever rest on her name," she said, her lips curling scornfully. "The world has judged and branded her. That story about Jack Hoover making a deathbed confession is very touching, but it is too thin.

"I for one refuse to believe it. If Marie was so innocent, how can you explain her elopement with Hoover? How are you going to get around the fact that she went to Cincinnati on the same night train with him?"

Gordon swallowed hard and his face grew a shade darker.

Wrath and indignation threatened to choke him. He knew that he could never convince this woman of Marie's innocence no matter how hard he tried.

"Enough!" he cried, his eyes flashing with anger. "It is utterly useless to explain to you. But you have my ultimatum. Keep your hands off my children, and don't you dare to interfere in any manner whatsoever with Miss Desmond. She is in absolute charge, and I stand behind her."

With this Philip Gordon turned abruptly and left the pavillion.

Alice stared after him for a moment, then burst into a discordant laugh. She measured the floor in long strides, her eyes dark and brooding.

"Alright, old dear," she muttered to herself. "If that is your ultimatum, I'll give you mine. For one thing I refuse to dance to your tune. I don't like it. Nora Ev-

ans stays here, that is settled. And you can keep that doll-faced governess.

"For all I know you are in love with her. Well, I should worry. You are not the only man on this earth. There are plenty of others, and some who are only too willing to be nice to me.

"I'll go my way and you can go yours, Phil Gordon. I mean to enjoy life in the fullest measure. I will drain the cup of pleasure while youth and beauty are still mine. Oh, you idiot!" Again she laughed, but this time softly.

"I wonder if you thought I married you because I loved you. I wanted liberty—absolute liberty such as only a married woman can enjoy. My life is my own, and I propose to do with it as I chose."

Other married women had given expression to the same sentiments only to come to grief. And Alice Gordon was to be no exception.

Chapter 58

AT BAR HARBOR

THE SUMMER SEASON at Bar Harbor was in full sway. Ruth Gordon's arrival was not preceded with any blare of trumpets, but after a few days her presence became known. Her youthful loveliness was the best advertising medium, and girls of her age are always welcome additions.

Chaperoned by Miss Olive Bentley, Ruth quickly made many acquaintances and quite a few friends. The most remarkable thing about her, however, was the tremendous change.

Amid scenes of careless gaiety she blossomed forth a wonderful young woman to behold. Her very laugh was music, and her every smile was like a ray of sunshine.

Not the least trace was left of her former mental ailment. She was keenly alive and enjoyed nothing more than spirited repartee.

Before long she became known as "the life of the party." No social gathering was complete nor a success without Ruth. She had admirers by the score.

One of them, in particular, seemed very much impressed with the girl's vivacity and good-fellowship.

It is of this man we must speak first, because the reader has met him before. Carlton McLain, finding the environment in Detroit no longer to his liking had taken to traveling about the country.

There were a few things he was trying to forget. One of them was the tragic death of his best friend, Waterford Burley, for whose untimely end he was direc-

ly responsible.

Another was the defeat he met at the hands of Betty Harding. It was not very often that this handsome novelist was refused the smiles of a woman.

As a rule they fawned upon him, for he was a writer of national reputation. What his reputation might be in another direction seemed to make little or no difference. Many things are easily condoned in a man of Carlton McLain's type.

During his travels the novelist met Vera Browning a celebrated actress. They had been introduced by a mutual friend in New York during the early spring.

Miss Browning took an instant liking to McLain, and suggested that he write a play for her.

"I have a cottage at Bar Harbor during the summer," she told him with a much-meaning smile. "The surroundings there are ideal for a man doing your kind of work."

That was invitation enough for McLain. The beginning of June found him installed at this famous sea shore resort. For six weeks he had worked feverishly at the play in which Vera Browning would star. And now the task was nearly completed.

The living room of Carlton McLain's cottage faced the ocean and the east. In its middle stood a flat-topped desk littered with piles of loose sheets of manuscript, some typed, and some in long hand.

McLain, his chair tilted forward in his eagerness, sat at his desk and wrote and rewrote a single sentence here and there, condensing and polishing.

He labored with this sentence in the feverish haste of a runner who sees ahead of him the tape toward which he drives himself and which marks the end of his long effort.

There was sweat on his forehead and his breath

panted a little. His tongue was between his teeth. Yet his was the haste of the victor, and the flush of triumph spread across his brow.

His task was finished. His fingers began to shake as he gathered up the manuscript and placed it in order.

After a moment he rose. From a bottle upon the desk he poured a drink. The glass in his hand he faced the mirror above the mantel. The face he saw was weary and distorted, but after a moment it twisted into an exultant smile.

He lifted the glass.

"Here is to you, old man!" he cried, his voice afire. And he drained the glass in a single swallow.

Well might he exult now, for he had no idea of the bitter disappointment in store for him. Already his mind was not quite at ease so far as Vera Browning was concerned. This beautiful actress had flatly refused to cooperate with him in any manner or form.

He had expected to derive an inspiration from her suggestions, and she had willfully failed to give them.

"I am taking a vacation," she had warned him one night at a cabaret. "I'll not talk about the play until you have finished it. Then bring it to me and read it, and there will be time enough to talk about it."

McLain had sought to overcome this determination on Miss Browning's part, sought to trick her into taking an interest by carefully made allusions to various scenes and situations.

But she had laughed him aside and refused to hear. So he had been forced to labor alone.

For one thing he knew Vera Browning's limitations too well. She was shallow as a child. Like a child she was capable of experiencing the most violent emotions.

She could weep, she could storm, she could woo,

she could coquette, she could be charming and she could smile. But it was ridiculous to suppose that Vera could think.

Too much—in fact everything depended upon the success of this play written for Miss Browning. Carlton McLain, owing to a lavish, reckless expenditure of money, was on the brink of utter financial ruin.

The play must be a success. The character he had drawn of Vera Browning was the Vera he knew. It was the Vera as the public believed her to be.

He made her charming when he choose in this play. But he made her despicable with an even keener relish. The audiences, he knew, found as much satisfaction in hating as in loving.

And so as McLain finished the work, he took time to count up his assets and also his liabilities. At the end he was forced to admit that he was nearly broke. And while his body relaxed, his thoughts were full of satisfied anticipation.

He would ask Vera Browning for a substantial advance on the play bound to be a success. But before that came to pass, she must have it read to her.

Her approval meant practically everything. He gathered up the manuscript put it away and then realized that he must change clothing before going on his daily trip of calling on some of his friends.

It was not very often that Carlton McLain dressed with great care, but he did so on this occasion. He left his cottage with a swinging gait. He took the path passing at once from the warm afternoon sun into a still sheltered shade.

Under his feet the pine needles palliated the harshness of the granite.

It was his intention to pass Olive Bentley's cottage, for he felt sure that she as well as her young

protege, Ruth Gordon, would be delighted to know that he had finished his arduous task of writing a play for Vera Browning.

Of the two girls, Ruth Gordon interested him most. In fact she interested him strangely. It had been his purpose to make sure of her, but his success was not worth mentioning.

McLain always preferred the younger girls for obvious reasons. But he also took the greatest care not to offend Olilve Bentley, for whom he had the highest regard.

She was a sort of an enigma to him. Although not yet thirty, she bore the visible marks left by a tragedy of some sort.

But those marks were most emphatically not of the physical kind. They were mental. One was not obliged to watch her closely in order to see that far-away look in her eyes.

It was whispered about that she had been disappointed in love during her service as a Red Cross nurse in the world war. Others, less inclined to speak kindly of Olive Bentley, hinted at uglier things.

It is not surprising that a man of Carlton McLain's caliber and type should find Bar Harbor a singularly attractive place.

He was what is often called "a ladies' man." He loved to mingle with the fair sex and he was not any too scrupulous in his dealings with them.

When he reached the Bentley cottage, he found Ruth Gordon alone.

"Where is your friend?" he inquired with a languid smile.

"Oh, Olive has gone swimming with some of her friends," the young girl answered.

"Why didn't you go too?" the novelist wanted to

know.

"I just didn't feel like it," said Ruth. "It is so hot and I enjoy reading all by myself. Won't you sit down and stay a while, Mr. McLain?"

He nodded his acquiescence and they both sat on the veranda. McLain lit a cigarette and offered the girl one.

"Go ahead," he urged when she seemed reluctant.

"I like them alright," she confessed. "But Olive does not approve of ladies smoking. She'd give me fits if she caught me at it."

"She never smokes herself, does she?" the novelist asked.

"Oh, no. She wouldn't even think of it."

"What Miss Bentley doesn't know about you won't worry her," McLain remarked with a melodious laugh. "Have a cigarette and keep me company. You can throw it away in case your friend should come."

Ruth accepted the weed and began to puff complacently.

"You know," she confessed, "I just love it here. But I would enjoy it a great deal more if Olive was not such an old-fashioned dear. She is always afraid of me getting in some sort of a scrape. Of course, I can't blame her so much at that.

"When my brother sent me here he evidently told her that he would hold her responsible for my moral welfare. Well, Olive is surely doing her best. Not that I blame her. She is a dear, I'll tell the world."

"Rather tiresome to be treated like a child, isn't it?" the novelist drawled

"It is," the young girl admitted. "But what can I do? Lord knows I am not deliberately trying to fall in love with every man I meet."

"Of course not," McLain agreed not very heartily.

"I wonder if Olive Bentley ever was in love?" he added after a moment's silence. "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if that were the case."

As he uttered the last sentence he slanted a furtive glance at Ruth Gordon.

The latter's features assumed an expression of importance. Before she spoke she looked quickly in every direction as if to make sure that only her visitor was within hearing.

"Olive was desperately in love," she said. "You'd never think it to look at her, for the man she fell for was married."

"Did she tell you that?" McLain suddenly sat up straight.

"Yes, a few days ago. Oh, there isn't very much I don't know about her. She likes to make a confidant of me," the girl chatted on. "But I ought not to blab this around. You won't tell, will you, Mr. McLain?"

"Certainly not," the latter assured her. "Who was the man, Ruth?"

"He was a doctor and they met in France during the war. They were stationed in the same town and they fell in love with each other. His name was Dr. Daniel Pogue. He——"

Ruth stopped suddenly when her companion emitted a long drawn out whistle.

"Why, what's the matter?" she cried.

"Nothing," McLain grinned. "By the way, did this Dr. Pogue tell Olive that he was a married man when he fell inlove with her?"

"He did. It was this fact which caused them to break off because Dr. Pogue could not get the divorce he wanted. There was some trouble about it, I believe."

Carlton McLain kept his surprise hidden. After a while he said:

"Can you keep a secret, Ruth?"

"You bet," came back promptly.

"This Dr. Daniel Pogue you mentioned is married to our friend Vera Browning, the actress," he declared.

"What?" cried Ruth, her eyes widening. "Good heavens, I did not think it would come so close to home. We better keep this dark. If Olive ever found out I told on her she'd never forgive me."

"Don't you worry on that score," he assured the young girl.

But Carlton McLain did not keep his promise. When Olive Bentley came home a few moments later he chatted with her for a few minutes, then took his departure. There was a peculiar smile on his face as he approached the cottage occupied by Vera Browning.

"I've got a good one to tell you," he cried after the usual greetings, and he repeated the information Ruth Gordon had given him.

The actress laughed until the tears came to her eyes.

"Good old Dan," she exclaimed mirthfully. "Would you believe it of him? Going off to France and picking up a girl, having a romance with her and giving her up for me. Was ever anything so funny?"

"It is the way you look at it," McLain grumbled disappointedly.

"Well, it is funny to me." Vera Browning laughed again, but this time maliciously. "This thing must not be shelved, Carlton. I am going to write to my husband and have him come here at once. And believe me, I want to be present when dear old Dan and Olive Bentley meet."

"How will you contrive that?" the writer asked.

"Why, I'll invite Olive and her young girl friend for dinner some evening," the actress replied quickly. "I am going to seat the lovers opposite one another and

then we'll watch the fun."

"It may not be fun, my dear," he said pessimistically.

"No matter what it'll be, I am going to get one immense kick out of it, old boy." An ugly gleam came into her eyes as she went on: "You know, I never liked Olive Bentley from the very beginning. It must have been a sort of an instinct which warned me against her.

"Well, we shall see what we shall see. I think I have a laugh coming to me at her expense. And—oh, boy, how I will enjoy that laugh. It will be loud and long."

Carlton McLain shrugged his shoulders. He felt rather uneasy about the matter.

There was no telling where it might lead. He had no desire to get mixed up in an affair of this character, although he had done his bit to start it.

"By the way, Vera," he remarked as he rose to go. "I have finished your play. When can I come over and read it to you?"

Miss Browning considered for a long moment.

"Let me see." She put a finger to her red lips—a characteristic move of hers. "To-morrow my parents are coming. Did you ever meet them, Carlton? But I suppose not. Mr. and Mrs. Galvin must be strangers to you. Well, suppose we make it Saturday. That will give me three days to get things straightened out."

McLain's crooked smile betrayed his chagrin. Saturday was nearly a week off. Again he was reminded that this actress was not a bit enthusiastic nor eager about the play she had commissioned him to write for her.

"Very well," he grumbled ungraciously as he stumbled from the room.

As he left the actress, McLain's mind became sorelly troubled. Her attitude with regard to the play puz-

zled him not a little. He began to wonder if Vear Browning would accept the play.

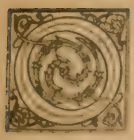
But what if she should find fault with it, and, perhaps, reject it? Such a thing was not at all impossible.

"She'll have to accept it," he muttered through his set teeth. "I won't be made a fool of by any woman. God only knows how badly I need the money. And she must pay me promptly, for I am broke—dead broke."

However, McLain had yet to learn that a woman may be coaxed to do things, but forced—never!

Chapter 59

A WOMAN'S SECRET



LD JOHN PROCTER'S life at Oak Manor was not altogether a pleasant one. There were conditions of which he very much disapproved, but could not change. The domestic difficulties of the Gordons were such that made his continued presence scarcely desirable. And yet he remained, hoping against hope that his daughter would come to her senses before it was too late.

His repeated admonitions had born no fruit so far. Alice had given him very plainly to understand that she resented his interference in the affairs concerning herself and her husband.

But Alice's continued slights and rebukes failed to make a lasting impression upon the old gentleman.

There never had been the least affection between her and her father. And now she never missed an opportunity to show her disrespect and contempt for him.

However, John Procter managed to extract quite a bit of pleasure from his protracted stay at his son-in-law's beautiful summer home. There were so many cozy nooks where among the flowers and shrubbery he could sit and dream of the past.

With one of his favorite brand of cigars between his lips, he would often remain on the grounds until long after dark.

Upon these occasions his thoughts were mostly of the one child he had loved so dearly and lost—his Betty. Ah, what would he not give to have her back again. And how bitterly he regretted his foolish pride and anger.

One night as he sat again on the bench in his favorite nook, he fell to dozing. And before he knew it he was soundly asleep. Suddenly, from somewhere, came the sound of stealthy footsteps.

Then came the crunching of gravel close to the bench, and the figure of a woman emerged slowly from the thicket.

At sight of the quiet form seated there she gave a start and uttered a low cry of alarm. Then she stood still and gazed at the sleeper as if spell-bound, pressing her hands to her heart.

The next moment she sank on her knees before old John Procter and with trembling lips whispered a name.

Sobbing softly, she bent down and kissed the hand which hung so limply at his side. He made a scarcely perceptible move, but she drew back in sudden fright. A faint smile stole over his face as if he was dreaming a wonderful dream.

The mysterious woman remained on her knees before him. She continued to sob and from time to time touched the sleeping man's hand caressingly.

"Oh, if I only dared to awaken him and tell him how dearly I love him," came from the woman in accents of infinite tenderness. "But I could not bear to hear him curse me as he surely would. It is best that he never knows how close I am to him."

A slight shiver shook the sleeping man and he groaned as if in pain.

The woman rose hastily, but she did not go. Her tear-dimmed eyes were fixed on his face.

"He must not remain here much longer," she said in a whisper. "It is getting too chilly. Exposure to this night air is dangerous for a man of his age. Oh, why don't someone come after him? I must rouse him—but

how?"

Hardly conscious of what she was doing in her anxiety she shook his arm. Instantly John Procter opened his eyes and sat up.

A subdued cry of alarm rose to the woman's lips. He stared at her and the stare was returned. He wanted to say something and couldn't. He appeared to be in a trance.

Stiff from the chilly night air and his long maintained uncomfortable position he made a desperate effort to rise to his feet. He uttered a name indistinct, and then the vision before him faded into the gloom and vanished.

Just as he struggled to his cramped legs, tottering and swaying, Phil Gordon almost ran into him. Fearing that something had happened to his father-in-law, Phil had come in search of him.

Upon approaching the spot he imagined he saw a dark, shadowy object which detached itself from the old man. It disappeared without making the slightest noise.

His first impulse had been to follow that mysterious form. It reminded him very much of his experience on two former occasions. But coming so suddenly in touch with the old gentleman rising from the bench, he changed his mind.

"Hello, dad," he exclaimed. "So here you are. I ran all over the grounds to find you. I was afraid something had happened to you. This chilly night air is not the best thing for you, so better come along. I'll give you a nice stimulating drink and tuck you in bed."

John Procter did not answer. He appeared to be dazed, and an expression of bewilderment overspread his face.

With one of his hands he kept on rubbing his forehead and eyes as if to collect his thoughts. While he did

this, he continued to stare in every direction.

"I—I don't see her," he muttered as if speaking to himself. "I wonder what has become of her."

"Who, dad?" Philip inquired with a smile.

The old man made no reply. He kept on staring Gordon took it for granted that he had just awakened from a doze. Just the same he could not fight off the feeling of a vague uneasiness that swept over him.

There was no longer any doubt in his mind that someone was prowling about the place at night.

Twice he had decided to have the tower searched, and each time something had prevented him from having it done. But this thing must be cleared up now without further delay, and he concluded to see to it the very next day.

"Alright, dad," he said, as his father-in-law began to shake. "I guess you are chilled alright. I'll take care of you."

With an affectionate tap on the shoulder he took the old gentleman by the arm and led him toward the house. With the help of a valet, John Procter was put to bed.

There was something about his condition, however, which puzzled Phil a great deal.

The vacant stare in his eyes seemed to indicate that he was either seriously ill, or his mind was wandering.

He behaved like a child and smiled gratefully as the covers were being tucked in all around him. Phil left the room after instructing the valet to keep an eye on his father-in-law.

With a shake of his head he proceeded down to the library where he smoked a cigar in silent reflection. He was thoroughly angered at his wife's heartlessness.

Continued in next number

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